



## COMMON CHALLENGES

Cross-branch collaboration is time and labor intensive, and it requires careful planning and coordination. The successes of previous three-branch approaches have been significant, but all such initiatives have faced challenges working across and within branches. Many of the challenges teams will face are common to all government initiatives, but the three-branch approach takes an intentional step back from common collaborative practice to focus on an issue in a new, more intensive way. Acknowledging these challenges at the outset of the initiative and addressing them as they arise can be the difference between success and failure.

### Recognizing and Addressing Common Cross-Branch Challenges

COMMON CHALLENGE	ACTION STRATEGIES
<b>Effective communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold in-person meetings early and throughout the initiative to facilitate effective interpersonal communications.</li> <li>• Identify a project manager to be the POC for questions, concerns, ideas and requests and to promote consistency and prevent duplication.</li> <li>• Proactively resolve conflict as it arises.</li> <li>• Develop discussion items for core teams to address early in the process — for example:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships between branches.</li> <li>• Negative media attention about a child welfare-related issue or incident.</li> <li>• Current political climate related to these or other issues.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Aligning priorities, developing consensus and dealing with limited resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind participants often of the desired outcomes for children that are shared across branches, along with common issues or problems.</li> <li>• Invite those with relevant lived experiences to help team members contextualize issues.</li> </ul>
<b>Data sharing across agencies and branches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach consensus with leadership in all three branches regarding data sharing, including the goals and circumstances for sharing information, the types of information to be shared and the mechanisms for effectively and appropriately sharing data.</li> <li>• Ask the state attorney general’s office or other legal experts for guidance on laws governing data sharing.</li> <li>• Enter into a data-sharing MOU, or introduce legislation that addresses data sharing.</li> <li>• Contract with a third party to assist with data exchange and analysis.</li> </ul>



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<p><b>Educating colleagues</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold educational meetings with colleagues within each branch.</li> <li>• Create short, informational memorandums on the issue.</li> <li>• Provide colleagues with regular updates on the three-branch approach.</li> <li>• Develop material, such as presentations, fact sheets and talking points, that team members can share with colleagues.</li> <li>• Request to present information about the three-branch approach at existing meetings or conferences.</li> <li>• Create a central hub where information can be stored and accessed by colleagues.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Difficulty effecting change at the state level in states with county-administered child welfare systems</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve county child welfare administrators in the core and implementation teams, or develop regional three-branch groups to work locally. Regional three-branch groups can be formed from members of the existing core, implementation or extended team that represents a county.</li> <li>• Include local leaders as part of the extended team to help build broad buy-in to the initiative.</li> <li>• Launch pilot initiatives in multiple locations to demonstrate success.</li> <li>• Offer statewide or regional training opportunities on relevant topics to educate stakeholders on the initiative’s intended outcomes.</li> <li>• Actively engage local leadership in the issue and in developing strategies for success.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Engaging members throughout the entirety of the initiative</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalize the three-branch approach through written MOUs or the cross-branch work groups or task forces that outline staff roles and responsibilities and the level of engagement required from the outset of the initiative. These documents can also be used to hold team members accountable.</li> <li>• Ensure that team members understand the goals of the initiative and their role in achieving those goals.</li> <li>• Create a role for each team member each time the initiative team convenes.</li> <li>• Establish an anticipated initiative duration:                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three-branch initiatives do not need to be long-term efforts. In some cases, short-term initiatives that dissolve when goals have been achieved make good sense. In other cases, the ongoing participation of all three branches is warranted.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Conflict over leadership and direction</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build broad buy-in from team members.</li> <li>• Develop a shared sense of the problem through cross-branch educational activities.</li> <li>• Ensure that team members are aware of their role in the initiative to help mitigate tensions over leadership.</li> <li>• Proactively address conflict over leadership and direction as it arises.</li> <li>• Build work groups that are chaired or co-chaired by implementation team members and involve diverse stakeholders from the implementation and extended teams.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Addressing turnover</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As teams are developed, be mindful of participants’ predictable turnover caused by term limits, elections, judicial rotations and other factors.</li> <li>• Diversify team membership by including participants from all levels of state government from all branches.</li> <li>• When turnover occurs, onboard new team members as quickly as possible, and hold in-person meetings to jumpstart rapport building.</li> <li>• Draft short summaries of the three-branch approach to provide to new team members, with clear descriptions of their roles and responsibilities within the initiative to help enable a smooth transition.</li> <li>• Develop a written succession plan at the outset of the initiative to ensure continuity of work when leadership or staff transitions occur.</li> </ul>